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Latina Business Owner Always on Patrol for New Business

Brooklyn, NY--- When she was forced to retire from the New York City Police Department in 1997 due to a leg injury, Myrna Franceschis knew she could grow what once was a job assignment into a new business for herself.

Franceschis had been asked if, as one of her volunteer duties, she could find relaxing, affordable vacation opportunities for her fellow cops who needed a break from their work. She found that she excelled as a “schmooser” when it came to getting good deals from vacation and cruise packagers. Of that ability Franceschis said, “It just came naturally to me from working the beat for so many years.”

Franceschis began honing her travel agent and business skills by working part-time for a travel agency in Park Slope, Brooklyn. She then set up her own part-time travel business from her home in 1995. She relied upon her co-workers, contacts and networks from the police force to successfully grow her business. With that success her home soon became one large filing cabinet piled high with paperwork, and at a certain point her husband told her she had to “get started on getting it all out of there.” So Franceschis set about finding an affordable storefront in an upscale neighborhood.

Franceschis ended up going one step further, and actually purchased the travel agency she once worked for in fashionable Park Slope. She continued to grow the business through a series of partnership opportunities with the likes of Carnival Cruise Lines and Pioneer Supermarkets, and sponsorships with Coca-Cola among others.

Then came 9/11 and business, like for most in the hard-hit travel industry, dropped off to almost nothing. At a loss, Franceschis heard from a colleague that low-interest disaster loans were available to eligible small businesses from the U.S. Small Business Administration. She applied for and received a \$40,000 SBA loan to use as working capital through that difficult period. At the same time she conceived of “The American Heros Program.” The program, arranged with Carnival Cruise Lines, provided restful and economical cruises for police, firefighters and EMT personnel who toiled at Ground Zero. Those strategies helped Franceschis avoid the fate of so many other travel companies at that time--- closure. She knew that if she could hang in during that difficult period she could build the business back up. Right now Monteli Travel is at about 50% of the business it was doing pre-9/11.

Franceschis attributes most of her success to cost-effective advertising and the fact that she is perpetually networking. She attends every networking opportunity she can to schmooze and exchange business cards, and makes a point of patronizing her fellow business owners in her neighborhood. And she is proud of the fact that her former co-workers in the police department regularly contact her for vacation packages, business opportunities and to get involved in charitable events. In fact, community involvement is just a normal part of Monteli Travel’s business. Among its many vacation giveaways, the company regularly sponsors an event for police officers and firefighters at Brooklyn’s Keystone Park. For its business success and volunteerism, Monteli Travel received an award from the Women’s Venture Fund, a visit from New York Congresswoman Nydia Vasquez, and was featured on the city’s television station NY1.

In offering advice to other aspiring entrepreneurs Franceschis said, “You really need a business plan to be successful, and you really need to network. You can’t just sit back and wait for business to come in, because it won’t happen.” Yes, Franceschis the former cop is still patrolling--- only now it’s for new business opportunities.

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